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The list of major items that Congress must confront in a lame-duck session is getting lengthy, but a few House conservatives say lawmakers should not return to Washington at all after the November elections.

With the House and Senate likely to close up the pre-election shop next week, action on expiring tax rates and subsidies, looming spending cuts, Medicare reimbursement rates and a cash-strapped Postal Service must wait until an abbreviated post-election session in November and December.

Veteran legislators say the lame-duck session, when the political constraints of the campaign have been lifted, could be a period ripe for deal-making.

But it's exactly that sentiment that frightens lawmakers like freshman Reps. Raul Labrador (R-Idaho) and Jeff Landry (R-La.).

"I think the decisions we make in the lame-duck session are not wise decisions for America," Labrador said. "It's better to have the duly elected representatives, not the people that are in that lame-duck status, not our president who may be in a lame-duck status, not a Harry Reid who will be in a lame-duck status. I want the duly elected representatives making the tough decisions that need to be made."

To that end, Labrador and Landry want the party leadership to skip a lame-duck session entirely, even if it means allowing higher tax rates and deep spending cuts to take effect before the next Congress can come back to address them retroactively. Republican leaders have warned for months that Congress must act before the end of the year to stop the George W. Bush-era tax cuts from expiring and to replace cuts to the Pentagon, known as sequestration, scheduled as part of the 2011 Budget Control Act.

"I don't think anyone in this room right here would like to come back for a lame-duck session," Landry said Wednesday at a gathering of conservatives.

As for halting the defense cuts, he reminded: "For the record, I didn't vote for sequestration."

Labrador and Landry are echoing a warning that conservative advocacy groups have been sending for months, reminding lawmakers of their opposition to the tax deal that was struck in the post-election period in 2010, weeks after Republicans won control of the House but before they took the gavel. Many freshman Republicans who came to Washington after that deal have denounced it.

"For many of us, we look at what happened two years ago and see the bad policy that came out of that last lame-duck session," Rep. David Schweikert (R-Ariz.) said.

House conservatives pushed Republican leaders to accept a six-month stopgap funding bill at higher levels in part so the issue would be removed from the post-election crush of activity.

Complaints about lame-duck sessions have been a recurring theme over the years. In the summer of 2010, Rep. Lynn Jenkins (R-Kan.) introduced legislation to prohibit them entirely.

Yet the push to scrap a lame-duck session altogether remains a minority view, even among staunch conservatives.

Rep. Tim Huelskamp (R-Kan.) is no fan of the lame duck, but he said his constituents trusted him to address tax rates then more than they trusted that a new Congress would lower them retroactively. He and other Republicans complained that while the House has acted to stop both the tax hikes and the Pentagon cuts, the Senate has not.

"The lame duck is a terrible way to do it, but it is much better than not doing it at all," freshman Rep. James Lankford (R-Okla.) said.

While some lawmakers have hopes of striking a grand bargain on taxes and the deficit in the weeks after the election, there is a growing consensus that Congress is more likely to enact a short-term fix to the fiscal cliff and kick the majority of the problem into the next administration. The contours of the deal would depend on the outcome of the presidential election.

Senior Republican officials view the idea of eliminating the lame-duck session as a nonstarter both politically and logistically, pointing to projections from economists that the fiscal-cliff combination of tax increases and spending cuts would send the nation back into recession.

“They must not have talked to their own CPA about that,” the chairman of the House Ways and Means subcommittee on taxes, Rep. Patrick Tiberi (R-Ohio), said of the suggestion that Congress let the tax rates expire and lower them retroactively. “I certainly understand their concern, but I would like to try to prevent the largest tax increase since I’ve been here in 2000 from occurring.”

Republicans would be blamed for the tax increase, he said.

“Doing it retroactively should be the last option, not the first option.” Tiberi added. “I don’t think there’s a compelling reason just to shut it down. I understand — I have that concern too — but we’re playing with people’s lives here.”

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